

# Today more than ever: Remembrance for the present and the future

**Hamburg needs a place dedicated to imparting information about Nazi persecution and resistance against it. Remembrance and education about the crimes of fascism is the responsibility of society as a whole – it does not belong in the hands of private investors.**

## **THE STADTHAUS WAS THE HEADQUARTERS OF NAZI TERROR**

Right in the heart of Hamburg is a building that, from 1933 until 1943, housed the headquarters of the Gestapo, the regular police force, the criminal police and various other police forces of the Third Reich. This building was the Stadthaus, and it was the nucleus of Nazi oppression for Hamburg and much of northern Germany:

- Here the Nazis planned and organised the deportation of Hamburg's Jews, Romani and Sinte.
- Here the notorious police battalions from Hamburg, Bremen and Lubeck were briefed and dispatched to their operations in the war of extermination.
- Here was the office of the Gestapo department responsible for the surveillance of hundreds of thousands of forced labourers, meting out punishments and sending them to concentration camps for the slightest alleged infringements. This department also directly took part in executions.
- Here many brave members of the political resistance movement, especially from the Communist and the Social Democratic parties, were interrogated, tortured and murdered.
- Here began the suffering of thousands of victims branded as Jehovah's Witnesses, as homosexuals, as fans of banned swing music, as supporters of opposing political creeds, as anti-socials or as professional criminals. They were persecuted, arrested and deported to prisons and concentration camps, and many were murdered there.

## **AFTER 1945: CONCEALMENT, SUPPRESSION, PRIVATISATION**

After the end of the Nazi dictatorship, the partially-destroyed building was rebuilt and became the office of Hamburg's building authorities. The knowledge of the crimes organised and committed here was concealed and suppressed for decades.

In 1981, on the insistence of a group of trade union members and at the request of building authority staff, a memorial plaque was installed, partly at their own

expense. Neither Hamburg's Senate nor its Parliament (Bürgerschaft) were interested in any further form of remembrance.

It took the Senate another 30 years to recognise, in connection with the privatisation of the city-owned Stadthaus building complex, the need to establish "a worthy remembrance of the victims of National Socialist tyranny in Hamburg". In the purchase contract, the property investor Quantum was compelled to commit itself to establishing and maintaining a "place of learning with a variety of contents (an exhibition, seminars, events, presentations, documentations)" in an exhibition area of approx. 750 square metres. This represents less than 0.4% of the overall area of the new luxury Stadthöfe quarter.

"The way we deal with the Stadthaus is a stress test for our city's culture of remembrance. We can only hope that Hamburg will pass this test."

Ex-Senator Prof. Dr. Joist Grolle in 2008 as Chairman of the Association for the History of Hamburg (Hamburger Abendblatt, 12.02.2008).

### **AN INFOPOINT INSTEAD OF WORTHY REMEMBRANCE**

But what has now happened to the 750 sqm that was agreed in the Stadthaus purchase contract?

In May 2018, a book shop called "Lesesaal" ("reading room") was opened at Stadthausbrücke 8a, complete with a café and a "history area". This "history area" has to make do with just 50 sqm, and is thus downgraded to a mere infopoint. As far as the investor is concerned, its obligations under the purchase contract have been fulfilled. Because they indiscriminately count the shop area, the café, the toilet facilities in the basement, the building's lift system and the "Arkaden" promenade within the Stadthöfe as parts of the "place of remembrance".

In spite of all protests, Hamburg's Minister of Culture has continued to confirm the investor's outrageous interpretation of the contract.

Thus, the privatisation of remembrance has turned the murderous Nazi history of the Stadthaus into a mere trifle.

### **CRITICISM AND PROTEST**

Since the beginning of 2018, associations of victims of Nazi persecution (VVN-BdA and AvS), historical workshop groups, initiatives for remembrance and many supporters such as the trade union group "Initiative Gedenktafel Stadthaus 1981"

have joined forces to form a Stadthaus Remembrance Initiative and have voiced their protest in various ways.

In response to this pressure from the public, Hamburg's cultural authorities have appointed an advisory council. Its members have stated that, in the 50 sqm currently allocated to the "history area", only an unacceptably superficial documentation of police and Nazi terror, murder, persecution and resistance is possible, and a suitable place of teaching and learning cannot be realised in the given conditions. They have demanded that additional space must be provided for this purpose.

In an open letter to the Mayor, numerous renowned historians have sharply criticised the concept produced by Quantum and the cultural authorities. Again and again, we are reminded that cities like Munster and Berlin, Munich and Nuremberg, Cologne and Dusseldorf have created modern and appropriate centres of documentation and remembrance in buildings that used to be headquarters of organised Nazi terror, just like the Stadthaus in Hamburg.

The large numbers of visitors to these places are proof of public interest and of the socio-historical importance of a culture of remembrance for the present and the future.

**We demand:**

- A place of learning, documentation and remembrance to acquaint the public with the history of the Stadthaus which is a part of the history of Hamburg.
- A place to present the story of the anti-fascist resistance and to commemorate the resistance fighters.
- This place of learning must have sufficient space to do justice at least to those exhibitions, and documentations that are already in existence.
- As a step towards this goal, the 750 sqm clause in the contract between the City of Hamburg and the investor Quantum must be enforced.

As a suitable location for this central place of learning and documentation, we strongly recommend the Görtz'sche Palais in Neuer Wall that housed among others the chiefs of several police forces and of the Gestapo, and through the gates of which the detainees and prisoners were brought into the Gestapo yard.

We are not prepared to tolerate this disrespectful treatment of the history of the Stadthaus. We are not prepared to accept those who rate the Nazi crimes as mere trivialities or who wish to set up the perpetrators as idols and role models. Here

in Hamburg, the treatment of the Stadthaus is a test of the credibility of official anti-fascist declarations.

## **WHAT CAN BE DONE:**

### **Picketing**

A picket takes place on most Fridays from 17:00 to 18:00 hrs to catch the attention of passers-by.

### **Information**

Please pass on our information and demands, especially to members of those parties that currently are in office (SPD and Green Party).

### **Donations**

To support our activities, please donate to the following bank account: VVN-BdA e.V. Hamburg | Hamburger Sparkasse IBAN DE78 2005 0550 1206 1271 83 | Reference: Stadthaus

### **Supporters:**

Amicale Internationale de Neuengamme; Arbeitsgemeinschaft Neuengamme e.V.; Arbeitskreis ehemals verfolgter und inhaftierter Sozialdemokraten (AvS); Auschwitz-Komitee in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland e.V. ; Berufsverband Bildender Künstlerinnen und Künstler e.V.; City-Hof e.V. – Für gelebte und gebaute Kultur; Denkmalverein Hamburg; Förderkreis Gedenkstätte und Lernort Stadthaus; Freundeskreis KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme e.V.; Gängeviertel; Gegen Vergessen – Für Demokratie e.V.; Geschichtswerkstatt St. Georg; Hamburger Bündnis gegen Rechts; Initiative Gedenktafel Stadthaus 1981; Landesjugendring Hamburg e.V.; Lelka & Mania; Netzwerk Rechtauf Stadt Hamburg; Stolperstein-Initiative Hamburg; Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes – Bund der AntifaschistInnen; ver.di: AK Antirassismus, FG Sozial-, Kinder- und Jugendhilfe, OV Hamburg des FB Medien, Kunst, Industrie; Verlag Assoziation A; Willi-Bredel-Gesellschaft, Geschichtswerkstatt e.V.; Dr. Sigrid Curth, Geschichtswerkstatt Wandsbek; Dr. Stephan Linck, Evangelische Akademie der Nordkirche; Hein Pfohlmann, 1. Vorsitzender des Kuratoriums der Gedenkstätte Ernst Thälmann Hamburg; Ibrahim Arslan; Detlef Baade; Prof. Dr. Ulrich Bauche; Rolf Becker; Esther Bejarano; Christine Ebeling; Bernhard Esser; Norbert Hackbusch; Hannes Heer; Ulrich Hentschel, Pastor i.R.; Barbara Hüsing; Michael Joho; Siri Keil; Bernhard Nette; Peggy Parnass; Bernhard Stietz-Leipnitz; Sönke Wandschneider, Pastor; Sylvia Wempner

V.i.S.d.P.: I. Jacob | Hein-Hoyer-Str. 41 | 20359 Hamburg